

Approved For Release 25X1
2008/11/18 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130

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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

The April Elections--Colombia At the Crossroads

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16 March ⁷⁷1972
No. 0843/72

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
16 March 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The April Elections--Colombia At the Crossroads

The nationwide local and departmental elections on 16 April will be a significant challenge to Colombia's traditional political system. The challenge is being posed by the populist ex-dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (now 72 years old) and his political machine, the mass-based National Popular Alliance (ANAPO), the most effective vote-getter in the country's political history. ANAPO has fed on widespread public disillusionment with the political and economic oligarchy that dominates Colombia's two traditional political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives. ANAPO came within a hair of winning the presidential elections two years ago. If it sweeps the elections next month, it may well become an unbeatable force in the 1974 presidential race.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Directorate for Plans.

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The Setting and The Stake

1. Pessimism and apprehension are surfacing as the country girds itself for the April contest. The campaign is under way at a time when unemployment and the cost of living are high and increasing, when peasant problems and the seizure of private land continue unabated, and when student disturbances are the daily rule.

2. Discontent, in one form or another, prevails at almost every level of society. Political uncertainty is high. These political difficulties stem, in part, from the nature of President Misael Pastrana's government and his seeming inability to come to grips with the country's problems. His is the last administration in the National Front Coalition, an agreement between liberals and conservatives to share power between 1958 and 1974. Uncertainty about the future is very real. The country has enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity since the what has been called the "Grand Coalition" came into being 14 years ago. The psychological effect of the April contest will have a major impact on the country's political leaders and their plans for the future.

3. The Liberal and Conservative parties have had an arrangement since 1958 that assured them of alternating the presidency every four years. Lacking any real competition, the parties have atrophied and fallen prey to factionalism. ANAPO, on the other hand, has remained fairly united around ex-dictator Rojas Pinilla and his politically astute daughter, Maria Eugenia Rojas de Moreno. It has maintained its internal organization--the best of any political party in Colombia--and has kept its profile high.

4. In recent weeks the Liberal and Conservative leaders have been attempting to strengthen and unify their parties and work together to defeat ANAPO in the coming elections. These efforts may be too little and too late. At stake are the

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seats for representatives in the 22 departmental assemblies, and for councilmen in 922 municipalities and four territories. ANAPO now controls, directly or through alliances, 16 of the 22 departmental assemblies as well as between 600 and 700 of the municipal councils. It will be difficult if not impossible to cut into these holdings.

5. Over 41 percent of Colombia's population lives in 24 cities of more than 100,000; of these, ANAPO and its allies control the municipal councils in 16 and dominate at least half the municipal councils in three others. The rapid growth of urban centers in recent years has given the municipal councils a political importance that they did not enjoy in the past. They play an important role in building a political organization and in winning voter support.

The National Front Parties

The Official Liberals

6. The Official Liberals consider themselves the legitimate and majority group within the traditional Liberal Party. In general this group is composed of conservative and moderate elements of the party that have supported the Pastrana administration. A good deal of its strength is based on the traditional "boss"-dominated municipal and departmental structures of the party. The leader of this faction is Julio Cesar Turbay.

7. The essence of party strategy is to meet the ANAPO on its own ground, especially in the large- and medium-sized cities. Attacks will be made on alleged ANAPO corruption, inefficiency, and dictatorial tendencies. The Official Liberals plan to rely heavily on radio and will stress personal contact with the voters.

The Dissident Liberals

8. These Liberals reject the claim of legitimacy made by the Official Liberals, and call themselves the true party. This group, in general, is

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composed of progressive and radical elements who look to the reforms carried out during the administration of Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966-1970) as a model for the future. They have discarded any centralized campaign in favor of a plan that would allow all the Dissident Liberal departmental organizations complete freedom to make any arrangement (such as collaboration with other parties) they believe necessary. The Dissident Liberals are particularly strong in the departments of Valle, Tolima, and Santander, where they probably will run lists containing only Dissidents. In other locations they can be expected to make deals with other political groupings for places on combined lists. The party leaders, Lleras and former foreign minister Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, are not scheduled to campaign in the April elections. Lleras' aloofness may damage this faction's chances.

The ConservativesOfficial Conservatives

9. The Official Conservatives led by ex-president Mariano Ospina and Alvaro Gomez Hurtado represent the overwhelming majority of the Conservative voters in Colombia and hold the majority of Conservative legislative seats. This party asserts that it is the legitimate heir of Colombia's Conservative tradition and it tends to be relatively cautious in supporting social and economic change. Party leaders are split regarding the policy they should follow vis-a-vis the Official Liberals. The party has a detailed plan for the campaign extending to election day. Like the Official Liberals, the Official Conservatives have decided against large urban demonstrations but will engage in personal contacts with the voters.

Popular Conservatives

10. This group is an outgrowth of the 1970 presidential campaign of Belisario Betancur and is in opposition to President Pastrana. Late last

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year ANAPO and the Popular Conservatives issued a declaration stating that they would cooperate during next month's election. In certain cases they will coordinate their campaign efforts and may compile joint electoral lists. Betancur wants to be president and looks on this loose alliance with ANAPO as the best way to advance his political ambitions.

Dissident Conservatives

11. This party is led by one of the Conservative leaders of Antioquia Department, J. Emilio Valderrama. It calls for the development and implementation of "progressive" programs to resolve Colombia's problems. Its greatest strength is in Antioquia, with some strength in the departments of Caldas and Santander.

The National Popular Alliance

12. ANAPO is a highly personalistic political party whose unsophisticated adherents display a fanatical trust and belief in Rojas. The party proclaims itself a revolutionary, nationalistic, and Christian movement, distinct from the traditional parties. It does not consider itself just another political entity concerned with winning elections. Because of its strong nationalistic bent and tendency toward populist and statist solutions, it represents a growing authoritarian and anti-democratic trend. It tends toward totalitarian solutions.

13. In the 1970 elections ANAPO showed its greatest strength and organization in the larger cities, where there are resources that can be used for patronage purposes and for direct financing of party campaigns. With the municipal council's ability to appoint comptrollers and treasurers, ANAPO partisans have been able in many instances to control municipal purse strings and push programs that enhance their political power.

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14. ANAPO has added to an already strong position by capitalizing on popular discontent with the policies of the National Front and with the "establishment" that it represents. ANAPO's confidence in victory is based on the party's strong organization and its continued appeal to the lower and lower middle classes. It is also capitalizing on the indecisiveness of the Pastrana government and the ineffectiveness of the traditional parties.

15. ANAPO is by no means free of difficulties. It suffers from internal splits caused by personal antagonisms and ideological differences. The splits are most apparent at the departmental and municipal levels, where factions and individuals fight among themselves over the spoils of office. It is also clear that ideological issues are causing significant tension between the right and left wings. These disputes are a source of concern for the leadership and could materially weaken the party if they are not brought under control. Serious problems exist in Antioquia, where ANAPO seems irreconcilably split, and in Valle, where personal power struggles have also weakened the party. Lesser differences are apparent in Quindio, Meta, and Santander.

16. Another drawback is the record of graft and corruption that characterized many of Rojas' years as president (1953-1957). Nevertheless, Rojas' name is known to practically every Colombian, and many give him credit for expressing their frustrations and aspirations by popular gestures such as denouncing wealthy landowners. During his regime, he provided a strong sense of national unity at a time of serious political turmoil. Moreover, the fairly good economic conditions and the stability of prices during his regime are more remembered than his harshly repressive methods and the authoritarian way he ran his government in later years.

The Campaign

For the Government:

17. One point of agreement between Liberals and Conservatives is that ANAPO must be defeated. Their

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campaign will attempt to portray ANAPO as the party of corruption, violence, dictatorship, and the spearhead for Communism.

18. Disregarding the tradition that a president plays no active role in the campaign, Pastrana has begun direct attacks against ANAPO. He has characterized it as a threat to democratic government and national development. He has also attacked the chaos, obstructionist tactics, and corruption that the government claims is the harvest of ANAPO power in the national congress, municipal councils, and departmental assemblies.

19. Under Pastrana's direction, the executive machinery--governors, mayors, and cabinet ministers--will be turned against ANAPO, as is customary in Colombian politics.

20. Former presidents have also joined the campaign. The first president under the National Front coalition, Alberto Lleras Camargo, is working for the Liberals. He has proposed that the National Front coalition be extended until 1978. Mariano Ospina, leader of the Conservative Party, has also lent the prestige of his name.

21. The major newspapers, all of which support one or another of the traditional parties, have launched strong attacks against ANAPO. Hardly a day passes without stories and pictures designed to discredit the opposition and frighten the public. Although ANAPO's strategy and the behavior of certain of its officials lend themselves to sensationalist reporting, there is no evidence yet that the base of its support--the lower classes--has been wooed away. Indeed, the press attacks may bolster the feeling of its sympathizers that if the elite groups are against the party, it must be the one for them.

22. Even though there is concern about the continuing disintegration of the National Front, the traditional parties do not seem to comprehend fully what is at stake, or the threat ANAPO poses to their interests. Furthermore, their internal disunity is helping the ANAPO cause.

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For ANAPO:

23. ANAPO's campaign plans are extensive and include public appearances by General Rojas and his daughter. Demonstrations are planned in large cities. Some campaign novelties have been introduced such as the use of helicopters. There are also plans to distribute recordings made by General Rojas in areas he will not visit in person.

24. ANAPO has made arrangements with other opposition elements to work against National Front groups in various departments. An agreement has been made with Belisario Betancur--the leader of the Popular Conservatives--that involves the coordination of their campaign efforts and the development of joint electoral lists in certain departments where such cooperation suits ANAPO's purposes. There are also understandings with other smaller opposition elements, such as the Communist Party, to consider the possibility of joint electoral lists.

25. Part of ANAPO's strategy will be to play on all the problems of Colombian society in order to bring the present administration and the traditional parties into disrepute. The party will hit hard at the rise in the cost of living which has almost doubled since 1970. It will also accuse the government of doing nothing to reduce unemployment, and point to corruption and inefficiency in government activities. In all of these areas ANAPO will seek to link the traditional parties with the government so that the people will reject them. On the other hand, ANAPO will seek to convince the electorate that it is the party that can satisfy the demands of the lower classes for shelter, education, increased health benefits, and jobs.

26. The relative weight of the charges and counter-charges will be difficult to determine. Nevertheless, it seems certain that ANAPO's charges against the high cost of living and unemployment will strike a sympathetic chord with the lower and lower middle classes who are most affected by these problems. The traditional parties' charges of violence and dictatorial tendencies will appeal to their supporters in the middle, upper middle, and upper classes.

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Consequences

27. One of the biggest problems of the election will be the degree of abstention. At present 8,887,500 Colombians have the right to vote. Voter turnout is expected to be between 30 and 40 percent of the eligible voters. Over the years the pattern of abstention has been greater among the lower and lower middle classes than among the middle and upper classes. Normally, midterm elections have drawn fewer voters than presidential elections. This time voter participation may be higher than usual because of the strong thrust of Rojas' ANAPO and the polarization of issues between it and the traditional parties.

28. The outcome will have an important bearing on political developments right up to the 1974 general elections--the first that will be open to all comers since the National Front came into being. Political leaders, businessmen, the military, and the government will follow the elections closely in an attempt to define the balance between the contending political parties.

29. A decisive ANAPO defeat would likely be considered a sign that it had peaked during the 1970 elections and is on the wane. On the other hand, a marginal victory or defeat for either side would not materially change the present situation. Under these circumstances the traditional parties would be likely to be deluded into believing that they are sufficiently strong to present individual candidates for 1974 without attempting to reorganize or strengthen their present structure. If ANAPO makes strong gains next month, it may well become an unbeatable voice in the 1974 general elections.